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'The Veil of Mystery:' Imperial Intelligence in the Arabian Peninsula

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ABSTRACT

This article contributes to the growing body of literature on intelligence in empire by examining British and Italian intelligence networks as imperial infrastructures in the Arabian Peninsula. Since the mid-1920s, the British and Italian empires had clashing strategic priorities, conflicting commercial interests, and diverging support for warring local leaders in Arabia. In an effort to limit competition, the British and Italians came to an agreement in early 1927 over their respective spheres of influence in Arabia. Many scholars have brushed over what has become known as the 'Rome Understanding' as largely ineffectual and having had little impact on the overall policy of the two empires. Far from being inconsequential, however, the Rome Understanding established a standard over the limits of empire in the Arabian Peninsula and gave rise to an information order in the region designed to enforce it. This article demonstrates that the British and Italians developed imperial intelligence networks as a tool designed to mediate competition and preserve cooperation under the Rome Understanding. I argue that both British and Italian interpretations of intelligence confirmed the policy of cooperation established in Rome.

KEYWORDS

Imperial intelligence; imperial cooperation; fascist Italy; British empire; Yemen; Saudi Arabia

Who exactly is Harold St John Philby? This is the question that tormented the Italian Foreign Ministry for years. Since the late 1920s, Italian officials had been preoccupied with the activities of the British national in the Arabian Peninsula. A flurry of reports flowed in and out of the Foreign Ministry as Italian diplomats struggled to lift 'the veil of mystery' and pinpoint what the 'mysterious character' was doing in Arabia.[1] Italian officials and imperial agents alike meticulously reported on the British Arabist's explorations across the Peninsula and detailed his meetings with local elites.[2] Other accounts were more trivial. Numerous reports tracked Philby's movements between the Middle East and

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London where he gave academic talks about his exploration of Arabia.[3] Some reports concluded that Philby was simply conducting research while others deduced that he had 'gone native' by converting to Islam. More troubling, a number of Italian agents suspected that Philby was a secret agent working to expand the British empire. Harold St John Philby was only one of the many characters on whom the Italians kept close tabs. By the early 1930s, intelligence reports flooded the Foreign Ministry with information about the activities of British subjects, agents, and pro-British elites in the Arabian Peninsula.

The study of intelligence was once considered a 'missing dimension' in international history.[4] While it has since become a well-established facet of the field, some scholars have suggested that it continues to remain a 'missing dimension' in the history of empire.[5] Yet the past decade has seen a considerable flourish of scholarship in this area. Historians tend to follow the lead of C.A. Bayly and his seminal work, *Empire and Information,* which introduced studies of intelligence to imperial history more than twenty years ago.[6] Most scholars have pursued a security-focused approach that explores the relationship between intelligence-gathering, knowledge production, and Idri imperial security within the borders of a single colonial space. In this respect, the experience of the Middle East during the early twentieth century has featured particularly prominently.[7] In a similar vein, historians such as Martin Thomas, Steven Wagner, and James Hevia have examined the degree to which colonial military intelligence shaped not only imperial policy, but also empire-state structures as well. A handful of recent publications have focused on colonial intelligence as the British empire grappled with its own decline when decolonisation swept across its colonies.[8] Calder Walton argues that British intelligence services played a central role in the transfers of power to newly independent states which allowed the declining British empire to preserve its interests in former imperial spaces.[9] Similarly, Sarah Mainwaring and Richard J. Aldrich demonstrate that the oft-overlooked role of signals intelligence served to sustain the British empire even as decolonisation gained speed.[10] Despite growing interest in addressing this 'missing dimension,' the field continues to be dominated by the tendency to focus on intelligence security institutions in the British empire within the borders of a particular colonial state.

The role of intelligence gathering *between* empires has received surprisingly little attention. This article goes beyond the colonial state framework and examines the role of imperial intelligence gathering networks between both the British and Italian empires in the Arabian Peninsula after the Rome Understanding. In the early months of 1927, the two governments came to an agreement in Rome over the limits of their respective empires in Arabia and agreed that no foreign power should establish itself on the eastern shore of the Red Sea. Many historians have brushed over the Rome Understanding as largely ineffectual and having had little impact on the overall policy of the two empires. Early historian of the Fascist period Renzo De Felice and his followers have long

denied that Benito Mussolini intentionally pursued an aggressive policy against the British empire and emphasise his desire for peaceful coexistence with the British.[11] Rosaria Quartararo, a student of De Felice, contends that while Mussolini approached the Rome Understanding in good faith, the British never truly respected Italian interests in Yemen and secretly aimed to undermine Italy in the region.[12] More recent scholarship, however, has focused on Mussolini's ideological ambitions to expand the Fascist Empire at the expense of the British. Manuela Williams and John Baldry largely disregard the Rome Understanding as a short-lived détente evocative of Italian deception.[13] Similarly, Massimiliano Fiore and Nir Arielli agree that while Mussolini valued short-term cooperation with the British, the Fascist dictator's activities in Arabia generated a greater threat to British interests than anywhere else in the Arab World during the 1920s and demonstrate that the British and Italians ultimately had irreconcilable goals.[14]

The 'missing dimension' of imperial intelligence within these explanations has produced an obscured understanding of interwar imperialism in the Arabian Peninsula that overemphasises the role of unmitigated competition between the British and Italians. Recent scholarship has stressed the need to explore how empires have formed arrangements, practices, or systems of cooperation to navigate imperial competition and threats to imperial security.[15] This is precisely what the British and Italian empires did by negotiating the Rome Understanding. The activities of British and Italian imperial intelligence networks reveal that the Rome Understanding actually established a normative standard over the limits of empire in Arabia. Fascist interpretations of intelligence show that, for the time being, Mussolini viewed cooperation with the British under the Rome Understanding as the most advantageous option to serve his empire-building objectives in the region. In fact, Fascist policymaking in the Arabian Peninsula demonstrates that while Mussolini was ideologically motivated to expand the Italian empire, there was also an element of *Realpolitik* and pragmatism in his policymaking.[16]

Ultimately, this article deepens our understanding of how empires cooperate by demonstrating that British and Italian intelligence networks functioned as essential imperial infrastructures in the Arabian Peninsula designed to mediate competition and preserve the imperial arrangement concluded under the Rome Understanding. In this context intelligence refers to the collection and analysis of information relevant to security, commerce, and foreign infiltration in order to most effectively use one's information against one's rival doing the same.[17] This article begins by examining the spectrum of imperial competition that the Rome Understanding aimed to resolve. It subsequently outlines the conceptual framework for my examination of intelligence networks as imperial infrastructures before turning to investigate their role in monitoring adherence to the Understanding. Finally, it will explore how the Rome Understanding facilitated a broader intelligence community in the Arabian Peninsula

as the two empires collaborated against the common security threat of Soviet subversion. This analysis reveals that British and Italian interpretations of intelligence repeatedly confirmed the policy of imperial cooperation established by the Rome Understanding.

Towards the Rome Understanding

By the mid-1920s, south-west Arabia had become the subject of a brewing rivalry between the British and Italians. Since the First World War, the majority of the Arabian Peninsula had been nominally independent, with the exception of Aden and the surrounding Protectorate under British oversight. The region bordering the Red Sea was made up of three primary kingdoms: The Kingdom of Yemen ruled by Imam Yahya; the Kingdom of Hejaz, Nejd and its Dependencies ruled by Ibn Saud; and the small principality of Asir ruled by Imam Idrisi. The independence of these kingdoms was largely self-declared and recognised by only a handful of European states. Existing outside of the League of Nations' system, the Arabian Peninsula was vulnerable to external influence and imperial infiltration in ways in which other independent states were not. Yet there is little evidence to suggest that either the British or the Italians ultimately aimed to formally annex and absorb these territories into their own respective empires proper. Instead, the two empires each pursued exploitive agreements and treaties with local populations in an effort to advance their own economic and strategic ambitions in the region. But as the postwar years dragged on, British and Italian interests in the region increasingly overlapped, clashed, and collided with one another. By 1926, escalating imperial competition in Arabia threatened to damage relations between the British and Italian empires on a much broader scale.

British interests in the Arabian Peninsula were primarily strategic.[18] The British had held a position in the colony of Aden and its surrounding hinterland to the north since 1839. The port of Aden grew in strategic importance throughout the century and came to serve as an essential imperial outpost between London and India after the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. The port city of Aden functioned as a vital fuelling station in passage through the Red Sea on voyages between the imperial metropole and the so-called crown jewel of the empire. By the 1880s, the British began to form treaty relations with local leaders in the hinterland surrounding Aden mirroring practices established in British India in order to ensure the port's security.[19] After the outbreak of war in 1914, the British concluded treaties with both Imam Idrisi and Ibn Saud against foreign aggression.[20] In contrast to the policy of annexation or occupation pursued in wartime North Africa and the Near East, the British used the treaty system in an effort to win the loyalty of ruling elites. By the end of the war, British imperial security fundamentally relied on maintaining peaceful relations with local leaders.

After the Great War, the British government struggled to balance its treaty obligations and strategic interests in the Arabian Peninsula with its postwar spending priorities.[21] Historians of British foreign policy are well acquainted with the Treasury Department's attempts to curb imperial defence spending during the 1920s.[22] In light of these financial priorities, the Cabinet remodelled British defence policy on the assumptions that peace reigned and that the empire was secure.[23] In the Arabian Peninsula, however, such was not the case.[24] The British faced Yemeni encroachments on Aden territory and reports of both Italian and Soviet infiltration in the region. While the security of Aden became increasingly precarious, the strategic value of the port city within the British empire only grew in significance. After the cessation of the Anglo-Japanese alliance in 1921, communication through the Red Sea grew progressively more important in order to ensure fleet access to the Singapore base.[25] Throughout the 1920s, the Foreign and Colonial Offices emphasised that the security of this region was a 'vital interest' of the British empire and argued that there could be no cuts to defence spending until these threats were alleviated.[26]

Unlike the British, the Italians were relatively newcomers to the Arabian Peninsula.[27] The British Foreign Office had been monitoring Italian intrigues in Arabia since autumn 1915 under the auspices of wartime Liberal Italy. Yet officials in the Foreign Office often struggled to determine the seriousness of Italy's interests in the region. The nationalist newspapers frequently urged the Italian government to use the war as an opportunity to establish a privileged position in the Red Sea.[28] Italian officials, however, dismissed these 'amateur correspondents' as being 'always on the lookout for something sensational' and reporting 'almost always irresponsibl[y]' implying that the inflammatory tone of the nationalist press did not reflect official policy.[29] But the Foreign Office received other information suggesting that the tone of the nationalist press may not be as divergent from the government position as some officials would have them believe. Repeated enquiries by Italian officials about the status of the Farasan Islands off the coast of Asir, frequent references about Italy's 'claim to equality' with the British and French empires, and intelligence reports documenting Italian activities in the region seemed to suggest that Liberal Italy had serious intentions to establish a position in Arabia.[30] By the end of the war, the Foreign Office had received a number of reports suggesting that Italian-sponsored agents were being sent on missions to Arabia to establish ties with the local leadership at the expense of the British position in the region.[31]

The rise of Fascism in 1922 further intensified Italian activities in Arabia. Within less than a year of the March on Rome, Benito Mussolini began to pursue a policy of 'peaceful penetration.'[32] Yemen had both strategic and economic value within the Fascist empire-building project. Extending the Fascist sphere of influence into Yemen would contribute towards Mussolini's ultimate

goal of breaking Italy out of its so-called Mediterranean prison and obtaining *spazio vitale*.[33] With a position in Arabia, the Italians could secure an outlet for their colonies in Somaliland and Eritrea and establish a naval base in the Indian Ocean with the potential to threaten British communication through the Red Sea. Throughout the 1920s, Jacopo Gasparini, the Governor of Eritrea, worked to reinforce trading ties between Yemen and Eritrea.[34] In early 1926, the Governor of Eritrea and the Colonial Ministry established a company known as SCITAR (Società Commerciale Italo-Araba) for the purpose of developing economic relations between Italy and Yemen. The company secured an oil monopoly in Yemen through a special concession from Imam Yahya. Meanwhile, the Italian government created an organisation in Italy for the sale of products exported from Yemen, specifically coffee and leather.[35] In autumn 1926, the Italians concluded a Treaty of Friendship and Commerce with Imam Yahya to strengthen their position in the region. In exchange for publicly recognising the independence of the Kingdom of Yemen, Imam Yahya granted Italy 'the right of way' in economic enterprise in Yemen through a secret annex.[36] After concluding the Treaty, Pietro Lanza di Scalea, Minister of the Colonies, boasted that the Italians could now view the 'Red Sea as an area of our influence.'[37]

Local tensions further intensified the stakes of this growing imperial competition between the British and Italians into the mid-1920s. British officials feared that Imam Yahya's increasingly aggressive behaviour towards both the Aden hinterland and Asir warned of his ambitions to expand the Yemeni empire with the support of the Italians.[38] In an effort to prevent the outbreak of hostilities, the British government negotiated an agreement with France, Belgium, and Italy in spring 1925 which aimed to prohibit the supply of arms to Arabian rulers.[39] But due to Italy's blatant violations of the agreement, only one year later the Cabinet decided to lift the arms embargo.[40] By summer 1926, this looming confrontation between Asir and Yemen threatened to drag the British and Italians into opposite sides of a proxy war.[41] British Foreign Secretary, Austen Chamberlain warned that 'we are engaging in a covert war with Italy. She under the Imam's flag and we under the Idrisi's.'[42] The Foreign Office cautioned that the 'clash' of interests between Britain and Italy in southern Arabia was 'likely to damage relations between the two countries' far beyond the Peninsula.[43] Mussolini also expressed concern over the impending conflict as he did not want imperial issues in the Red Sea to lead to a dispute between Italy and Britain on a more global scale.[44]

In an effort to prevent imperial competition from spiralling out of control, the British and Italians opted to negotiate an agreement over the limits of empire in Arabia. In Whitehall, the Cabinet determined that unless the British pursued a policy of cooperation, the only other 'solution to Italian activities' was to strengthen defences in the region in preparation for a direct conflict with the Italians.[45] The Colonial Office responded that 'it was inconceivable

that Britain would engage in anything like a conflict with Italy over this corner of Arabia.'[46] In the Foreign Office, Foreign Secretary Austen Chamberlain pointed out that all reports 'go to show that [the Italians] are working primarily to establish for themselves a position in Arabia. This operation by no means requires the undermine of ours.'[47] In Rome, the Foreign Ministry held the view that while the Italians had interests in Arabia, they need not conflict with the British. For nearly a year, Gasparini had been encouraging the Colonial Ministry to conclude an imperial agreement with the British that would divide the Peninsula into two spheres of influence. Italian Foreign Minister Dino Grandi suggested that the British and Italians should confirm their 'friendship' and 'cooperation in this sphere as [they have] in others.'[48] By the end of 1926, both British and Italian officials had come to the conclusion that unchecked imperial competition posed a far greater risk than negotiating some form of compromise and mutual understanding in Arabia.

In the early months of 1927, the British and Italians began exchanging notes to delineate the scope of the negotiations to take place in Rome. Representing the British in these imperial talks were British Ambassador to Rome, Ronald Graham, and British colonial administrator and expert on the Arabian Peninsula, Sir Gilbert Clayton while Governor of Eritrea Jacopo Gasparini and young Fascist zealot and Director General for Europe and the Levant, Raffaele Guariglia, represented the Italian side. After nearly a month of negotiations, this small group of officials and experts reached a common view of empire in Arabia. The Rome Understanding established *de facto* spheres of influence in the Peninsula. The Kingdom of Hejaz and Nejd and the principality of Asir fell within the British sphere while Yemen came under Italian influence. The text of the Rome Understanding committed the two governments to 'exercise' their respective 'influences' on Ibn Saud, Imam Yahya, and Imam Idrisi towards eliminating causes of conflict between them.[49] In practice, the Understanding established a new standard for a cooperative imperial endeavour in which the British and Italians recognised the limits of their respective influence in Arabia in an effort to regulate and reduce competition between them.

Intelligence Networks as Imperial Infrastructures in the Arabian Peninsula

Throughout the remainder of the 1920s and the early 1930s, intelligence networks emerged as the primary instrument for managing the precarity and fragility of the spheres of influence understanding between the British and the Italians in the region. While colonial intelligence networks had been active in the Near East since the turn of the twentieth century,[50] the intelligence state and security state models do not apply in the Arabian Peninsula as in its Near Eastern neighbours. In contrast to the former Ottoman spaces placed under the Permanent Mandates Commission of the League of Nations,

empire in south-west Arabia was largely governed by this loose spheres of influence arrangement imposed over nominally independent territories.[51] In negotiating the Rome Understanding, the British and Italian empires were far more concerned with curbing competition for resources, enterprise, and strategic locations between themselves than they were with establishing colonial rule and order over the indigenous populations. Rather than closely monitoring the movements and activities of colonial subjects, the two empires began to surveil one another. Intelligence gathering in the Arabian Peninsula took on a new urgency after the talks in Rome as it became the key tool used to assess compliance with this new imperial arrangement. By amassing these surveillance networks, the British and Italians also began to lay their own respective imperial infrastructures across the Peninsula which overlapped with the local sovereignties of these formally independent kingdoms and diverted certain degrees of authority to the imperial metropoles in London and Rome.[52]

In many ways, the true nature of intelligence gathering in Arabia has been tainted by a clout of mystery and a veil of romance by histories of European exploration of Arabia. The exploits of T. E. Lawrence and his colleagues have been the subject of many narratives of Britain's Middle East.[53] Yet it is important to recognise that the imperial intelligence networks in Arabia extended far beyond a handful of notorious British agents. At the same time, the imperial intelligence infrastructure in Arabia was also significantly less bureaucratic and less institutionalised than in other parts of the empire. Calder Walton has shown that the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) and MI5 took on increasing responsibilities during the interwar years for overall imperial security intelligence in key parts of the empire despite shrinking budgets.[54] But as an imperial outpost under the oversight of the India Office, the intelligence activities shaping the imperial information order in Aden and its neighbours were far looser in nature. The British intelligence network in Arabia emanated outward from the Aden Protectorate and was made up of a range of various officials from the imperial security forces, local police, air staff, and the Government Code and Cypher School who acquired information to monitor the local activities of imperial competitors. The Italian intelligence network, by contrast, included a number of agents from the Servizio Informazioni Militare (SIM) based out of either Rome or Eritrea sent to live in Arabia disguised as business people, professors, or healthcare workers and keep close tabs on British activities to report back to Rome either directly or through local consulates.

The exploitation of human intelligence from these networks was frequently viewed as the most valuable form of intelligence gathering in the Arabian Peninsula after the Rome Understanding.[55] In both British and Italian cases, each intelligence community in the region revolved around a handful of European intermediaries to whom a network of local agents and informants reported. As D. K. Lahiri Chowdhury has shown in the context of British India, potentially everybody was an informer.[56] Some locals were 'professional'

informants in the pay of the imperial security services.[57] The relationship between informers and imperial authorities could also be much less formalised.[58] Similar to what Richard J. Popplewell has suggested in his study of British India, in many cases, these informers and agents would not have viewed themselves as 'spies'.[59] Examined from this perspective, intelligence gathering in the Arabian Peninsula was far from an exclusively European activity manned by an elite few as the prominent exploits of famed European explorers have led us to believe. Rather, it involved a diverse array of individuals local to the region, travelling from Europe, or from other parts of the world, each with their own interests.

In this context, the human component of HUMINT in Arabia should not be underestimated. Mainwaring and Aldrich have been rightly critical of the emphasis on human agents in studies of colonial intelligence and it would be inaccurate to suggest that signals intelligence – particularly for the British – held no significance for empire in Arabia.[60] Yet examining the operations of human intelligence does provide insight into how this loose imperial arrangement actually worked on the ground. In many respects, the dedication of the local individuals involved in producing human intelligence was equally as important as the intelligence that they produced.[61] These imperial intelligence networks relied on the shifting loyalties and interests of the local populations who dealt with their own evolving interests, opportunities, and frustrations in negotiating space, status, and belonging in Arabia.[62] British and Italian activities in the region often hinged on the quality of information received both about one another's imperial pursuits and the attitudes of local populations vis-à-vis their respective imperial competitor. As such, imperial operations depended on preserving and expanding a degree of control and influence over the locals involved in producing these information orders.[63] Together, these respective networks of loyal individuals, the information that they produced, and the means by which they communicated it constituted a base imperial infrastructure for each empire in a region which preserved the appearance of independence for the duration of the interwar years.

In many ways, efforts to monitor the Rome Understanding through these intelligence networks even further entrenched empire in the Arabian Peninsula. By amassing networks of agents and informants to produce information about local conditions, the two empires developed certain degrees of authority over the local information orders and, in doing so, disrupted that of the local leadership. These networks of imperial and local agents collected information about the movements and activities of individuals and organisations enabling colonial officials to evaluate threats posed to their respective position in south-west Arabia. Agents in empire also produced extensive amounts of often unreliable and inaccurate reports.[64] Yet nearly all of the information that British and Italian decision-makers had access to about empire in Arabia was acquired through these networks. While reliable information became periodically

scarce, the networks involved in producing this information continued to grow. By experimenting with intelligence gathering and using a wide range of local agents, non-state actors, military officials, aerial reconnaissance, and interception of coded communications, the two empires forged imperial infrastructures which overlapped with and subverted local sovereignties in their quest to enforce compliance with the Rome Understanding and strengthen their own imperial security vis-à-vis one another and other imperial competitors in the region.

Monitoring the Rome Understanding

The Rome Understanding produced a regional intelligence order designed to maintain the *de facto* spheres of influence arrangement in Arabia. In many ways, mutual suspicion characterised the frequent and often frantic intelligence reporting that emerged in the late 1920s. Yet intelligence-gathering was not solely a competitive endeavour. This section demonstrates that both the British and Italians used intelligence gathering networks as a tool to navigate and mitigate imperial competition and preserve the cooperative imperial arrangement established in Rome. Throughout the latter half of the 1920s and the early 1930s, intelligence reports frequently revealed alleged violations of the agreements made in Rome. But rather than prompt a shift in policy, interpretations of intelligence often reinforced the perceived need for the Rome Understanding. These reports exposed the mutual vulnerability of the British and Italian empires in the Arabian Peninsula. Interpretations of intelligence reinforced the assumption that an imperial arrangement, even an imperfect one, was more advantageous than unrestrained imperial competition. Ultimately, imperial intelligence prompted decision-makers in London and Rome to prioritise maintaining the loose, and even flawed, imperial arrangement in Arabia through a policy of cooperation rather than abandon it altogether and risk reverting to unregulated, escalating competition which had characterised the state of affairs in the region prior to the Rome Understanding.

After the talks in Rome, the British were primarily concerned with preserving the territorial integrity of the Farasan Islands and consolidating the shared border between Yemen and Aden. The highly coveted, potentially oil-rich Farasan Islands off the coast of Asir held an important role in British imperial security in the region. The Admiralty and the Air Ministry argued that if a foreign power were to establish either an air base or naval base on the Islands, it would constitute a serious threat to British communications and require a strengthening of British defences in the region.[65] By the mid-1920s, the Farasan Islands had become a key area of interest among a number of powers as Imam Idrisi opened up the Islands for commercial activity. The Foreign Office claimed that the British must 'ensure that if any

concessions are granted, they go to a British company' because of the high strategic value of the Islands.[66] Since spring 1926, British and Italian firms had been vying for commercial dominance of the Islands. But in negotiations for the Rome Understanding, the British secured *de facto* oversight of the Islands under the British sphere of influence and confirmed that no foreign power should establish a political position on the Islands.[67]

The British government kept close tabs on Italian commercial activities in the region to ensure that Italian enterprise did not impede on the British sphere of influence. After the Rome Understanding, the Italian Colonial Ministry sent 'archaeological missions' to Asir bearing gifts and donations for the tribal leaders of the Farasan Islands in an effort to gain the local leadership's consent for an Italian oil concession.[68] The Italians established a close relationship with who they believed to be highly respected local elites, such as Sayed Al-Mirghani and Abdullah Soheili, who travelled across Asir with money, gifts, and promises of Italian goodwill in an attempt to secure a privileged position for Italian firms in the Farasan Islands.[69] The British received a number of reports from their own network of local agents in Asir that there had been an influx of Italian naval activity in the region. They also had evidence that Sayed Al-Mirghani and Abdullah Soheili were attempting to sway local elites to fall under Italian influence and grant the Italians an oil concession.[70]

The British government received countless reports detailing the subversive activities of Italian agents in the British sphere, but Whitehall often remained hesitant to act. Almost all reports carried a similar message: Italian agents were violating the Rome Understanding. Most Foreign Office officials, however, dismissed the reports as inaccurate or unimportant. Many of these reports came from agents who either reported to the British consulates in Arabia or who were hired by British commercial firms operating in the region. These agents and informants were rarely British nationals. As several scholars have shown, colonial prejudices and assumptions about race often tainted intelligence analysis and collection.[71] Within the British colonial mind, the reports of agents indigenous to the Arabian Peninsula needed to be regarded with scepticism. In interpreting the reports of Sayed Moustapha, an agent from Asir hired by a British oil company, the Resident at Aden noted that the agent's 'love of power' no doubt 'play[ed] a part in his actions.'[72] The Foreign Office deemed many of these agents and informants untrustworthy and self-interested and believed that their reports were influenced by ulterior motives and the regional feud between Ibn Saud and Imam Yahya.[73] Orientalist views of colonial subjects as cunning and corrupt prompted Colonial Office and Foreign Office officials to rely very little on intelligence reports when it came to policymaking vis-a-vis Italy in Arabia.

Many Foreign Office officials believed that the Italians intended to honour the Rome Understanding and that the reports of colonial agents were simply trying to make trouble between the two empires. Foreign Office officials

D'Arcy Osborne and Lancelot Oliphant remained adamant that Mussolini had 'every intention to observe and abide honourably' to the Rome Understanding.[74] Upon receiving reports about the activities of Italian agents in Asir, another Foreign Office official noted that 'one can hardly believe that the Italians are spending money on the Asiri chiefs' and that the only reason they would be doing so would be to combat the 'growth and consolidation of Ibn Saud's influence' in the Peninsula.[75] Foreign Office expert on the Middle East, George Rendel emphasised that the British must be careful not to allow these 'suspicions that the Italians are not playing straight' to 'influence our policy too obviously.'[76] While doubtful of the seriousness of these reports, Foreign Office officials mentioned to the Italian Ambassador in London reports of 'Italian agents' in Asir on a number of occasions. But despite these reports of Italian violations of the spheres of influence arrangement, the Foreign Office used these exchanges with the Italian Ambassador to reaffirm the importance of the Rome Understanding in maintaining peace in the region between hostile rulers for the purpose of British imperial security and Italian commercial expansion.[77] A belief in Italian goodwill combined with tainted assumptions about the motives of local agents frequently led the Foreign Office to misinterpret what were largely accurate intelligence reports of Italian activities in the region.

Beyond the security of Asir and the Farasan Islands, the British aimed to consolidate the shared border between Aden and Yemen after the Rome Understanding. British decision-makers anticipated that a secure border would allow them to reduce the imperial defence requirements in Aden reflecting the Treasury's postwar defence policy.[78] The Air Force stationed in Aden carried out countless reconnaissance missions into Yemeni territory to monitor the activities of the tribes under Imam Yahya.[79] Italian agents, however, believed that these reconnaissance missions were suggestive of British designs on Yemen. The Italian consulate in Aden frequently sent reports to the Foreign Ministry about 'Yemeni whistleblowers' who provided intelligence on British activities at the Aden-Yemeni border. These accounts reported that the British were conducting 'continuous reconnaissance' by airplane deep into Yemeni territory.[80] The Colonial Ministry was convinced that the British were attempting to use the 'border issue' to mask their intentions to 'threaten [Italy's] position in Yemen.'[81]

The Italians developed a vast intelligence network in the Arabian Peninsula in order to monitor and surveil the development of, and threats to, their commercial activities in Yemen. The Italian consulates in Aden and Jedda formed networks of agents and informers across the Peninsula. Some agents were Italian nationals, but many were Yemenis who had an interest in seeing Italy remain in the region. From Eritrea, Gasparini also established connections with a number of local elites who frequently travelled between Eritrea and Yemen to monitor British activities.[82] Earlier in the 1920s, the Italians had

begun to establish medical infrastructure in Yemen which offered a convenient cover for Italian agents in Arabia. The Servizio Informazioni Militare (SIM) collected information from a number of doctors sent to the region.[83] Dr. Saranelli and Dr. Ansaldi featured particularly prominently in Foreign Ministry reports on activities in the region. These doctors befriended Imam Yahya and a number of his advisors and gauged the Yemeni leadership's loyalty to the Italians and interactions with other foreign governments.[84]

After the Rome Understanding, Italy's primary concern was the security of its growing commercial interests in Yemen. Following the talks in Rome, the Italians quickly ramped up activities in their sphere of influence and worked to establish commercial dominance in Yemen. In their quest for commercial supremacy, the Italians confronted a number of obstacles as the loyalties of local elites swayed in response to perceived foreign bribery.[85] Intelligence gathering networks emerged as Italy's primary tool for both strengthening imperial security and entrenching the Italian empire in Yemen by amassing a growing web of loyal local actors. Continuous surveillance and endless reporting characterised the Italian imperial intelligence gathering technique. Italy's precarious position in Yemen frequently gave rise to information panics as the Foreign Ministry struggled to determine the legitimacy of reported rumours.[86] Out of all the reports received, the Foreign Ministry usually believed the worst. The nature of intelligence reporting and interpretation reveals a deep paranoia in the Fascist official mind that other empires were out to sabotage the Italian position in Yemen.

The Italians suspected that the British were carrying out a campaign to undermine Italy's commercial ambitions in Yemen.[87] Gasparini believed that a certain Captain Crauford was a British agent sent to supplant Italian commerce in the region. Captain Crauford owned one of the companies involved in the competition for an oil concession in the Farasan Islands in the months leading up to the discussions in Rome. Gasparini had 'no doubt' that Crauford's activities in the Arabian Peninsula were of a 'political character.'[88] After the Rome Understanding, the Colonial Ministry began to receive reports that Crauford had been meeting with Imam Yahya in an attempt to force him to accept proposals for the expansion of British influence in Yemen.[89] Gasparini argued that Crauford's activities indicated Britain's 'non-compliance with the Rome Conversations.'[90] The Italian Foreign Ministry broached the issue with the British Foreign Office on a number of occasions, but the Foreign Office repeatedly stated that Crauford was engaged in private commercial negotiations and was not acting on behalf of the British government in Arabia.[91] The Italians, however, remained convinced that Crauford was an undercover agent. Intelligence reports on Captain Crauford's activities in the Arabian Peninsula appeared to confirm the Foreign Ministry's fears that the British would not adhere to the Rome Understanding.

The Foreign Ministry suspected that British activities in the Kingdom of Hejaz, Nejd and its Dependencies aimed to sabotage the Italian position in the Peninsula as a whole. Imam Yahya and Ibn Saud had been rivals for years as each leader aimed to expand his territory at the expense of the other. The Foreign Ministry received information that British agents 'inspired, controlled, and directed' a movement to establish a pan-Arab federation in the Peninsula under the leadership of Ibn Saud.[92] Intelligence reports insisted that the British had given their support to Ibn Saud's expansionist endeavours at the expense of the Italians in Yemen violating the *status quo* under the Rome Understanding.[93] Italian intelligence suggested that by supporting the expansion of the Saudi Kingdom, the British aimed to secure political and economic dominance in the whole of the region rendering the 'Red Sea exclusively a British lake.'[94] The Foreign Ministry received reports from an 'Eritrea informant' that in exchange for their support for a pan-Arab Saudi kingdom, Ibn Saud had promised the British economic supremacy in the Arabian Peninsula.[95]

The Italian Foreign Ministry was convinced that Harold St John Philby was the main agent behind Britain's activities in Hejaz, Nejd, and its Dependencies. Philby was a British Arabist and father of the future Cambridge Five member, Kim Philby. Philby the senior had worked as a British colonial official in the Middle East for years before converting to Islam and becoming a close confidant of Ibn Saud. At some point in the early 1930s, Philby was appointed financial advisor to Ibn Saud. The Italian Foreign Ministry received hundreds of reports on Philby's activities from their network of agents in the region. Numerous reports claimed that Philby was an 'English spy' who had been given a mission to cripple Ibn Saud's leadership from the inside allowing the British to absorb the region into the British Empire and oversee the development of a pan-Arab federation.[96] Italian agents also reported that Philby acted as a figurehead for a company owned by the British government, Sharqieh Limited.[97] A number of Italian agents met with Philby directly in an attempt to uncover the details of his mission.[98] The Foreign Ministry was confident that Philby's activities in Arabia aimed to harm Italy's interests in Yemen.

Despite reports of subversive British activities in the Peninsula, the Italians opted to preserve the Rome Understanding. Italian Foreign Minister Dino Grandi held the Rome Understanding in high esteem. He explained to the Minister of the Colonies that the Understanding was the 'Magna Carta of our political situation in the Red Sea.'[99] On a number of occasions, the Foreign Ministry ordered the Italian Ambassador to London to remind the British of their commitments under the Rome Understanding to curb Ibn Saud's aggression towards Yemen in maintenance of the territorial *status quo* and in preservation of peace in the region.[100] The Italian Ambassador also noted that the activities of Philby were contrary to conversations in Rome. In response, several Foreign Office officials emphasised that Philby was not in Arabia on

official orders and that his activities were considered 'harmful scams' against the British Empire.[101]

Much of the Italian intel was inaccurate. For the most part, the British were only concerned with imperial security through the Red Sea. Yet these faulty interpretations encouraged the Foreign Ministry to work to maintain the Rome Understanding rather than to abandon it. Dino Grandi argued that it would be more advantageous to 'keep with the spirit of the Italian-British conversations of 1927' and to 'induce England to persist as well' while 'counter[ing] the ongoing British plans for an Arab Federation' sympathetic to the British empire.[102] Similarly, Mussolini claimed that Italian activities in Yemen were 'inspired by the spirit of the conversations in Rome' and that the Italian Ambassador in London should 'inspire the same spirit of moderation and conciliation' from the British.[103] The Fascist leadership concluded that the perceived threat of British political and economic power in Arabia made it vital for Italy to preserve the limits of the Rome Understanding while pressuring the British to do the same.

For both the Italians and the British, intelligence reports exposed imperial tensions contrary to the Rome Understanding. Interpretations of these reports, however, often reaffirmed the logic upon which the Rome Understanding had been based in the first place; imperial competition needed limits. On several occasions, when suspicious activities were reported, British and Italian diplomats reminded each other of these limits. Intelligence gathering facilitated a great deal of talk between the two governments as they attempted to hold one another accountable to the terms of the agreement in Rome and enforce compliance with the loose spheres of influence arrangement governing their imperial activities in the region. These practices of intelligence gathering also make visible the imperial infrastructures operating across the region as the two empires amassed constellations of local actors who shared information and engaged in activities intended to either enhance or impede the security of the opposing empire. Even when the accuracy of intelligence-reporting was in question, the perceived loyalty and obedience of the individuals involved in these networks remained a key secondary goal. Interpretations of intelligence acquired through these imperial infrastructures repeatedly reinforced the belief among British and Italian decision-makers that there was more to gain from a shared policy of cooperation, despite its flaws, than from unrestrained imperial competition.

Collaborating Against a Common Enemy: The Soviet Threat

The Rome Understanding also facilitated collaboration between the British and Italian imperial intelligence networks and contributed to the development of a broader inter-imperial intelligence community in the region.[104] Since the end of the First World War, both the British and Italians had been highly sceptical

of Soviet designs across Europe and empire.[105] The British had learned of the insurrectionist capabilities of Soviet influence from their experience in other parts of the empire while many Italians had experienced first-hand the threat of Bolshevist revolution during the years of repeated internal disorder during the early 1920s.[106] Before the talks in Rome, both the British and Italian governments feared possible Soviet subversion extending into the Arabian Peninsula. A central aspect of the negotiations for the Rome Understanding was the agreement that no foreign power should establish itself on the eastern shore of the Red Sea. Under this term of the Understanding, the two governments worked together to prevent the Soviets from obtaining a substantial position in the Arabian Peninsula. In an effort to preserve the *status quo*, the British and Italians began to share information, reports, and intelligence-gathering tactics for monitoring Soviet activities in the region. The common threat of Soviet subversion encouraged the two empires to preserve and strengthen cooperation over empire in Arabia.

Italian intelligence reports suggested that the Soviets intended to supplant Italy's position in Yemen. In autumn 1927, Imam Yahya refused to renew the oil concessions to the Italian monopoly overseen by SCITAR.[107] The company subsequently split into a number of smaller firms.[108] The return to free competition for oil concessions in Yemen appeared to open up space for Soviet economic infiltration. Initially, intelligence reports did not produce a clear picture of Soviet involvement in this process. The Italian Foreign Ministry received a myriad of reports that several of their Yemeni agents were double dealing with the Soviets and arranging oil concessions in exchange for war materiel and financial support.[109] Yet other reports suggested that this information was 'exaggerated' and that the evidence did not suggest 'intentions of the Soviet Union to create difficulties for Italy in its colonies.'[110] It appears, however, that these reports suggesting an absence of Soviet action were considerably less convincing to the Foreign Ministry. On several occasions, the Italians shared information with the British about Soviet efforts to bribe local Arab leaders and the movement of Soviet steamships loaded with ammunition but made little to no mention of reports suggesting such information may be unreliable.[111]

In these instances, Italian interpretations of intelligence actually proved quite accurate. After the SCITAR debacle, the Italian imperial intelligence network intensified surveillance of suspected Soviet agents in Arabia while the Foreign Ministry escalated efforts to intercept communications between Moscow and the Red Sea.[112] By the end of the decade, Soviet activities in Yemen had become 'increasingly intense.'[113] Local reports suggested that 'Soviet agents' had 'gained a position of considerable importance' in favour of 'Russian trade' in the region.[114] Similarly, British intelligence indicated that the Russian Trading Company had made efforts to strengthen commercial activity in the areas of kerosene oil, flour, sugar, and matches.[115] An agreement concluded between the Soviet Union and Imam Yahya in spring 1929 further

formalised the Russian position in the region. By summer 1929, the Foreign Ministry conceded that the Soviets had achieved a predominant economic position in Yemen that threatened to totally eclipse Italian commerce in the region.[116] As the 1920s came to a close, the Foreign and Colonial Ministries frantically attempted to 'establish a solid Italian economic body' in the Arabian Peninsula as SCITAR fell into liquidation and Italian policy in Yemen faced near 'inevitable bankruptcy.'[117]

The British also observed Soviet activities in the region with increasing concern. Like their Italian counterparts, the Foreign Office and Colonial Office kept a close watch on Soviet activities across the Arabian Peninsula in the years after the Rome Understanding. Yet British officials often struggled to evaluate the severity of the Soviet threat in south-west Arabia. The Foreign Office received a range of alarming reports about Soviet propaganda in the region. One article, for example, denounced British and Italian imperialism in the region and proclaimed that the Arabian territories could secure 'freedom from imperialism' if they united 'only from below'.[118] It suggested that Soviet influence and support promised to provide the 'essential conditions for unification' towards a pan-Arab federation.[119] The Foreign Office also received information that Soviet agents were attempting to forge a pan-Arab confederation explicitly directed against British influence across the entire Middle East.[120] The Political Resident in Aden, however, suggested that Soviet activities particularly in Yemen were not nearly as threatening as they appeared. This colonial official surmised that Soviet agents primarily worked for the Russian Trading Company to establish commercial ties with Imam Yahya and judged that 'it [was] extremely unlikely' that communist propaganda 'would have any measure of success' in Yemen.[121] Amidst these conflicting analyses, British officials in Whitehall encountered serious challenges in measuring the danger of and formulating a response to the Soviet threat in the region.

British intelligence reports raised the greatest concern about Soviet activities in the Saudi Kingdom. Based on information received about the situation, the High Commissioner of Egypt urged the Foreign Office that 'we cannot afford to leave Ibn Saud without guidance and help' with respect to the 'Bolshevik penetration into Western Arabia.'[122] There was a very 'obvious danger' to the British if Bolshevik propaganda proved successful in 'a country like the Hejaz' as it served as the 'annual meeting place of the Eastern races.'[123] One informant pointed out that the recent visit of Emir Shekib Arslan to Moscow indicated that Syrian advisors would now be swayed in a 'pro-Bolshevik sense' and that 'if left alone' Ibn Saud may not continue his 'energetic resistance to Bolshevik penetration.'[124] Other British agents deduced that Bolshevik efforts to economically penetrate both Hejaz and Yemen masked serious political action directed against the British.[125] Still other intelligence reports suggested that Soviet agents were on a mission to repair relations between Imam Yahya and Ibn Saud in pursuit of the formation of this anti-British

bloc.[126] While British intelligence reports painted a threatening picture of the scope and nature of Soviet activities in the region, several Foreign Office officials believed that they were tainted by the 'unnecessarily apprehensive' outlook of the men-on-the-spot in Arabia.[127]

British and Italian analyses of the available information on Soviet activities in Arabia ultimately prompted both governments to strengthen cooperation under the Rome Understanding against a common security threat. The Italian Foreign Ministry believed that Soviet activities in Yemen were anti-British in nature. On several occasions, the Italians even considered pursuing economic collaboration with the Soviets to advance Italy's position in the region at the expense of the British. But when deciding between economic collaboration with the Soviets or 'agreement with England to eliminate Soviet agents', the Foreign Ministry concluded that Italy must 'choose the latter.'[128] For their part, British Foreign Office officials initially expressed considerable scepticism that the Soviets posed a real threat in the region and questioned whether the Italians were using a false threat of Soviet subversion to maintain close relations with the British.[129] While a number of Foreign Office officials believed that reports of Soviet subversion were just another Italian 'bluff,' there was a widespread sense in the British government that on the matter of Soviet influences in Arabia, it was better to be safe than sorry particularly considering the threat that Bolshevism had posed in other parts of the empire.

In light of the Soviet threat, Dino Grandi proposed that it was in the 'common interest of the two countries' to keep one another 'informed of Moscow's action' in the Arabian Peninsula.[130] In a meeting between the British Resident at Aden and the new Governor of Eritrea in spring 1929, the officials reaffirmed that their governments should pursue 'Anglo-Italian solidarity' against Soviet penetration in Arabia.[131] After the Rome Understanding, both the men-on-the-spot in Arabia and officials in London and Rome exchanged information about Soviet activities in the Arabian Peninsula.[132] This practice became increasingly important for both governments particularly after the conclusion of the commercial treaty between the Soviet Union and Yemen in spring 1929. Beyond the exchange of information, local agents also exchanged tactics and contacts. Numerous reports suggest that local agents in Arabia provided one another with local informants and even met with them together. The common Soviet threat facilitated an inter-imperial intelligence community in which British and Italian agents and officials collaborated across their operational boundaries to preserve the *status quo* against a common threat to the security of imperial priorities in their own respective spheres of influence.

Conclusion

Historians have been too quick to dismiss the Rome Understanding. Far from being inconsequential, the Rome Understanding established a standard over the

limits of empire in south-west Arabia and gave rise to an information order in the region designed to enforce it. It is true that Benito Mussolini ultimately aimed to expand the Fascist empire beyond the confines of the settlement in Rome. In the mid-1920s, however, the Fascist leadership determined that it had more to gain from a system of cooperation than from unrestrained imperial competition. Through the Rome Understanding, the Italians secured the British empire's recognition of Italy's special position in Yemen. The Italian leadership viewed this as a 'concrete advantage' for the Italian empire.[133] Even when confronted with alleged British infractions, Grandi argued that 'freedom of action' would not be of 'any immediate utility' for Italian interests in the region.[134] Italian assessments of intelligence reports reveal the essential role that the Rome conversations played in guiding Fascist policy in the late 1920s and early 1930s.

The Rome Understanding prompted both British and Italian empires to forge imperial infrastructures in the Arabian Peninsula through a system of imperial surveillance to monitor compliance with the spheres of influence arrangement. Imperial intelligence networks were not only a method used to maintain internal control or to produce knowledge about colonised populations as others have shown. In the Arabian Peninsula, British and Italian imperial intelligence networks had a dual purpose. On one hand, the British and Italians used imperial intelligence networks to monitor one another's adherence to the Rome Understanding and to mediate instances of competition. On the other, the two empires encouraged their intelligence networks to collaborate against external threats to the spheres of influence arrangement in Arabia. Both of these tasks relied on networks of loyal local actors with the capacity to communicate information acquired about empire in the region to imperial authorities. Through these imperial intelligence networks, the two empires exchanged knowledge, ideas, and methods on matters pertaining to both intelligence collection and the limits of imperial rule in Arabia.

Intelligence did not fundamentally direct policy making. Instead, it confirmed the policy of cooperation established by the Rome Understanding. The British and Italian experiences were characterised by both bad intel and faulty interpretations. When interpreting intelligence reports, policymakers had a tendency to hold up a mirror to their own designs in the Arabian Peninsula. The British largely abided by the terms of the Rome Understanding and believed that the Italians would do so as well. In the long run, the Italians aimed to expand their position in the Peninsula and assumed that the British also intended do so. The British intelligence failure in the Arabian Peninsula was a result of faulty interpretation: although British decision-makers believed otherwise, the Italians were usually doing what British intelligence reports said they were. For the Italians, the opposite was true. The Italian intelligence failure was a result of a continuous information panic. Intelligence reports falsely confirmed Italian suspicions of British activities. Rather ironically, these

faulty interpretations and bad intel encouraged both the British and Italians to preserve the cooperative imperial arrangement established in Rome.

These conclusions also deepen historical understandings of empire-building during the interwar years more broadly. They demonstrate that developing, expanding, and deploying intelligence networks emerged as a central way of *doing empire* during this period. In many ways, the experience of empire-building in south west Arabia during the interwar years mirrors the experience of Britain's imperial withdrawal described by Calder Walton which took place decades later. As the British reached the twilight of empire, they pursued clandestine activities to maintain their vital interests in soon-to-be independent states. Yet these covert intelligence networks not only help to explain Britain's end of empire, but also help us to understand the process of empire-building earlier in the century. This was by no means an exclusively British practice. As the overt violence associated with imperial conquest and annexation became an increasingly critiqued and scrutinised imperial practice,[135] empires turned to covert operations to secure the economic and strategic interests in particular regions which maintained the appearance of independence. In this sense, focusing on imperial intelligence offers an alternative framework to the 'formal' and 'informal' empire dichotomy that has long characterised the field. Viewing intelligence networks as imperial infrastructures makes visible the ways in which empires forged webs of information and communication through constellations of local and foreign actors in order to subvert the monopoly over these critical information infrastructures traditionally held by sovereign independent states. Intelligence networks like those in Arabia emerged as essential imperial infrastructures used to expose local tensions, navigate imperial competition, and collaborate against common security threats in a world increasingly critical of empire-by-brute-force.

Notes

1. Toffo to Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 23 December 1932, Archivio Storico Ministero degli Affari Esteri [hereafter ASMAE], Affari Politici (1931-1945) [hereafter AP (II)], Arabia, b. 7, fasc. 4; Caetano to Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 8 February 1928, ASMAE, Affari Politici (1919-1930) [hereafter AP (I)], Arabia, b. 800, fasc. 873.
2. See Canero Medici to Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 7 December 1932, ASMAE, AP (II), Arabia b. 7, fasc. 4; Rulli to Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 12 April 1932, ASMAE, AP (II), Arabia b. 7, fasc. 4; Consolato d'Italia e Hegiaz to Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 20 September 1932, ASMAE, AP (II), Arabia, b. 7, fasc. 4.
3. Bodonaro to Minsitero degli Affari Esteri, 7 April 1928, ASMAE, AP (II), Arabia, b. 7, fasc. 4; Consolato e Hegiaz to Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 20 September 1932, ASMAE, AP (II), Arabia, b. 7, fasc. 4.
4. See Andrew and Dilks, *The Missing Dimension*; Jackson and Scott (eds.), *Understanding Intelligence in the Twenty-First Century*; Ferris, *Intelligence and Strategy*; Ferris, "The Road to Bletchley Park."

5. See Thomas, *Empires of Intelligence*, 13; Walton, *Empire of Secrets*, 330; Wagner, *Statecraft by Stealth*, 5.
6. Bayly, *Empire and Information*.
7. See Sheffy, *British Military Intelligence in the Palestine Campaign*; Sheffy, "The Spy Who Never Was"; Sheffy, "British Intelligence and the Middle East 1900–1918"; Williams, "Mussolini's Secret War in the Mediterranean and the Middle East"; Satia, *Spies in Arabia*; Mohs, *Military Intelligence and the Arab Revolt*; Owen, "British and French Military Intelligence in Syria and Palestine, 1914-1918"; Gilchrist, "Sharing Empire".
8. See Maguire, "Counter-Subversion in Early Cold War Britain".
9. Walton, *Empire of Secrets*.
10. Mainwaring and Aldrich, "The Secret Empire of Signals Intelligence".
11. See de Felice, *Mussolini il fascista: Parte 1, Volume 2*.
12. Quartararo, 'L'Italia e lo Yemen".
13. Williams, *Mussolini's Propaganda Abroad*, 31; Baldry, "Anglo-Italian Rivalry".
14. Massimiliano Fiore, *Anglo-Italian Relations in the Middle East*; Arielli, *Fascist Italy and the Middle East*.
15. See MacKenzie, "European Imperialism"; Barth and Cvetkovski (eds.), *Imperial Cooperation and Transfer, 1870-1930*; Pedersen, *The Guardians*; Brückenhaus, *Policing Transnational Protest*.
16. This interpretation parallels Christian Goeschel's recent study of Fascist foreign policymaking in Europe. See Goeschel, *Mussolini and Hitler*.
17. This view of intelligence parallels John Ferris's explanation of intelligence between states and Steven B Wagner's definition of intelligence in empire: Ferris, *Intelligence and Strategy,* 99; Wagner, 3.
18. For a comprehensive overview of British interests in Arabia, see Leatherdale, *Britain and Saudi Arabia, 1925-1939*; Kostiner, "Britain and the Northern Frontier of the Saudi State"; Tripodi, "The Foreign Office and Anglo-Italian Involvement in the Red Sea and Arabia".
19. Smith, "Rulers and Residents; Dresch, *A History of Yemen*.
20. Colonial Office [hereafter CO] Memorandum, 18 October 1926, CAB 24/182/2.
21. See Ferris, *Men, Money, and Diplomacy*; Doerr, *British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939*; McKercher, *Transition of Power*.
22. See Ferris, *Men, Money, and Diplomacy*; Doerr, *British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939*; McKercher, *Transition of Power*.
23. Ferris, *Men, Money, and Diplomacy,* 25-30.
24. War Office to Colonial Office, 28 December 1922, CO 725/4/64060, TNA.
25. Tripodi, 211.
26. Hankey Memorandum, 9 November 1926, CAB 24/182/2, TNA; Colonial Office [hereafter CO] Memorandum, 29 November 1926, CAB 24/182/40, TNA; Ronald Graham to Foreign Office [hereafter FO], 13 January 1927, FO 371/12235, E 229/22/91, TNA.
27. Rosaria Quartararo provides an analysis of the nature of Italian concerns leading up to the Rome Understanding, See Quartararo, 811-72.
28. See for example, High Commissioner for Egypt to E. Grey, 10 September 1915, FO 141/464/5, TNA; R. Rodd to E. Grey, 24 July 1916, FO 141/464/5, TNA.
29. R. Rodd to E. Grey, 9 October 1915, FO 141/464/5, TNA.
30. Egyptian High Commissioner to FO, 16 December 1916, FO 141/464/5, TNA; G. Clayton to Egyptian High Commissioner, 22 August 1916, FO 141/464/5, TNA; Aden to Egyptian High Commissioner, 3 October 1917, FO 141/464/5, TNA; Egyptian High Commissioner to A. Balfour, 23 May 1919, FO 141/464/5, TNA.

31. Egyptian High Commissioner to A. Balfour, 23 May 1919, FO 141/464/5, TNA; Egyptian High Commissioner to G. Curzon, 25 May 1919, FO 141/464/5, TNA; Aden Political Resident to Egyptian High Commissioner, 21 July 1919, FO 141/464/5, TNA.
32. Mussolini to Della Torretta, 27 August 1926, *I Documenti Diplomatici Italiani* [hereafter *DDI*], S. 7, Vol. 4, No. 397, 306.
33. See Williams, *Mussolini's Propaganda Abroad,* 31-39; Fiore, 9-11; Arielli, 19-20.
34. Jemen e l'Eritrea, 6 September 1924, Archivi [di Famiglie di Persone: Jacopo] Gasparini, b. 4, Archivio Centrale dello Stato [hereafter ACS]; Eritrea ed Jemen, May-June 1925, Archivi Gasparini, b. 4, ACS; Mussolini to Della Torretta, 27 August 1926, *DDI*, S. 7, Vol. 4, No. 397, 306.
35. Guariglia to Grandi, 5 March 1930, *DDI*, S. 7, Vol. 8, No. 407, 474-7.
36. Annesso Al Trattato Italo-Iemenita, 2 September 1927, ASMAE, AP (I), Arabia, b. 80, fasc. 867.
37. Lanza di Scalea to Mussolini, 10 September 1926, *DDI*, S. 7, Vol. 4, No. 414, 319.
38. Mallet Memorandum, 15 July 1926, FO 371/11447, E 4332/2660/91, TNA; Osborne Minute, 20 July 1926, E 4679/2660/91, FO 371/11448, TNA.
39. Oliphant Minute, 3 August 1926, FO 371/11447, E 4637/2660/91, TNA.
40. Mallett Minute, 14 July 1926, FO 371/11447, E 4215/2660/91, TNA; Annual Report on Italy for 1926, Ronald Graham to Austen Chamberlain, 21 April 1927, FO 371/2206, C 3729/3729/22, TNA.
41. Oliphant Minute, 3 August 1926, FO 371/11447, E 4637/2660/91, TNA.
42. A. Chamberlain Minute, 20 July 1926, FO 371/11448, E 4679/2660/91, TNA.
43. CO Memorandum, 18 October 1926, CAB 24/182/2, TNA.
44. Mussolini to King Emmanuel III, 30 September 1926, *DDI*, S.7, Vol. 4, No. 442, 341.
45. CO (Memorandum), 29 November 1926, CAB 24/182/40. The British also had intelligence that the Italians were inclined to conclude an agreement. Paternò to Ministry of Colonies, 17 November 1926, HW 12/89/124691.
46. CO to FO, 5 August 1926, FO 371/11447, E 4631/2660/91, TNA.
47. A. Chamberlain to Lloyd, 6 December 1926, FO 371/12239, E 5061/22/91, TNA.
48. A. Chamberlain to Wingfield, 13 September 1926, FO 371/11448, E 5369/2660/91, TNA.
49. Clayton to Tyrrell, 10 February 1927, FO 371/12236, E 701/22/91, TNA.
50. See Sheffy, *British Military Intelligence in the Palestine Campaign, 1914-1918*; Sheffy, "The Spy Who Never Was An intelligence myth in Palestine 1914-18," 123-42; Sheffy, "British Intelligence and the Middle East 1900–1918 how much do we know?" 33-52; Satia, *Spies in Arabia,* 3-7; Walton, *Empire of Secrets,* 1-30.
51. See Martin Thomas, 1-7; Wagner, 7.
52. See Gilchrist, 4.
53. See Satia, *Spies in Arabia*; Asher, *Lawrence*; Meyers (ed), *T. E. Lawrence.*
54. Walton, 15-7.
55. See Thomas, 24-5.
56. Chowdhury, "Sinews of Panic and the Nerves of Empire".
57. In the months after the Rome Understanding, the British Colonial Office began to compile a working list of 'Arab Personalities' with connections to the Italians. It distinguished between a number of local Italian agents including Jemal Pasha, Mohammed Omer Dunkali, and Sheikh Taher Sheneti believed to be employed by SIM and pro-Italian individuals suspected of acting as informers and who advanced the Italian cause due to an alignment of interests. While colonial authorities correctly identified a number of key personalities associated with the Italians, they underestimated the formality of the relationship between them in several instances. "Arab

Personalities," 29 November 1927, CO 725/13/12/48091, TNA. The Italian practice of cataloguing suspected individuals with connections to the British was considerably less bureaucratic. Quarterly annual reports of general political activities in the region identified individuals believed to be carrying out British activities. One report, for example, indicated that a man named Saleh Saied Baduai "basically belongs to the British" while others make references to well-known English informant. Rapporti Politici, June 1930, ASMAE, AP (I), b. 805, fasc. 896.

58. Records sent from colonial authorities to the British Foreign Office and the Italian Foreign Ministry frequently mention intelligence received by 'trusted' informants. The Italians often refer to these informants by name or by pseudonym. See for example Gasparini to Foreign Ministry, 28 March 1927, ASMAE, AP (I), b. 805, fasc. 865; Consolato Gedda to Foreign Ministry, 30 March 1930, ASMAE, AP (I), b. 805, fasc. 896; Consolato Gedda to Foreign Ministry, 7 May 1930, ASMAE, AP (I), b. 805, fasc. 896. By contrast, the British documentation refers to 'free hand' private contractors by name while presumed-to-be local informants remain nameless. See for example, Lloyd to A. Chamberlain, 23 January 1928, FO 371/13003, E 384/80/91, TNA; Lloyd to A. Chamberlain, 30 January 1928, FO 371/13003, E 482/80/91, TNA; Bond to Foreign Office, 6 December 1929, FO 371/13723, E 6568/54/91, TNA.
59. Poppelwell, *Intelligence and Imperial Defence.*
60. Mainwaring and Aldrich, 56.
61. A similar dynamic can be observed in the case of Italian empire-building in the Palestine Mandate during the 1930s. See Gilchrist, 1-19.
62. See Gilchrist, 4.
63. See Gilchrist, 3.
64. See Ferris, *Intelligence and Strategy,* 99.
65. Hankey Memorandum, 9 November 1927, CAB 24/182/2, TNA.
66. Malkin Minute, 22 November 1926, FO 371/11448, E 6351/2660/91, TNA.
67. Clayton to Tyrrell, 10 February 1927, FO 371/12236, E 701/22/91, TNA.
68. Ministero delle Colonie to Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 8 March 1928, ASMAE, AP (I), Arabia, b. 800, fasc. 873.
69. Moustapha El-Idrisi to Lloyd, 26 April 1927, FO 371/12237, E 2028/22/91, TNA.
70. CO to Oliphant, 17 January 1927, FO 371/12235, E 306/22/91, TNA; Mayers to FO, 25 March 1927, FO 371/12236, E 1794/22/91, TNA; Mustapha El-Idrisi to Lloyd, 26 April 1927, FO 371/12237, E 2028/22/91, TNA; Steward to CO, 22 July 1927, FO 371/12237, E 3223/22/91, TNA; Stonehewer Bird to FO, 25 July 1927, FO 371/12237, E 3285/22/91l, TNA; Stonehewer Bird to FO, 1 August 1927, FO 371/12237, E 3391/22/91, TNA; Lloyd to A. Chamberlain, 14 January 1928, FO 371/13003, E 384/80/91, TNA; Syed Moustpha to Lloyd, 20 January 1928, FO 371/13003, E 482/80/91, TNA; Bond to Rendel, 4 May 1930, FO 371/14461, E 2576/91/91, TNA.
71. Wagner, 4; Thomas, 76-78; Satia, 5.
72. Steward to CO, 22 July 1927, FO 371/12237, E 3223/22/91, TNA.
73. Osborne Minute, 6 May 1927, FO 371/12237, E 2028/22/91, TNA.
74. Oliphant Minute, 6 February 1928, FO 371/13003, E 384/80/91, TNA.
75. Warner Minute, 22 May 1930, FO 371/14461, E 2576/91/91, TNA.
76. Rendel Minute, 3 January 1929, FO 371/13721, E 54/54/91, TNA.
77. See for example, Osborne to Bordonaro, 2 September 1927, FO 371/12238, E 3664/22/91, TNA.
78. 3 November 1926, CAB 53/1/11, TNA.
79. FO Memorandum, 13 December 1927, FO 371/12239, E 5343/22/91, TNA; Stewart to Shuckburgh, 11 February 1928, FO 371/13003, E 776/80/91, TNA. Martin Thomas

and Priya Satia highlight the role of aerial surveillance in British intelligence gathering: Thomas, 141-142, 194-198; Satia, 7-8.

80. Canero Medici to Minstero degli Affari Esteri, 28 November 1928, ASMAE, AP (I), Arabia, b. 800, fasc. 865.
81. Ministero delle Colonie to Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 21 November 1927, ASMAE, AP (I), Arabia, b, 800, fasc. 865.
82. Consolato Gedda to Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 30 March 1930, ASMAE, AP (I), Arabia, b. 805, fasc. 896.
83. Arielli, 22.
84. See Rapporti Politici, May 1930, ASMAE, AP (I), Arabia, b. 805, fasc. 896; Rapporti Politici, June 1930, ASMAE, AP (I), Arabia, b. 805, fasc. 896; Rapporti Politici, July 1930, ASMAE, AP (I), b. 805, fasc. 896.
85. See Gasparini to Federzoni, 9 April 1927, ASMAE, AP (I), b. 800, fasc. 870; Mussolini to Bordonaro, 21 October 1927, ASMAE, AP (I), Arabia, b. 800, fasc. 865; Canero Medici to Zoli, 7 May 1930, ASMAE, AP (I), b. 805, fasc. 896.
86. For more on information panics, see Thomas, 25-7.
87. Gasparini to Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 28 March 1927, ASMAE, AP (I), Arabia, b. 800, fasc. 865; Gasparini to Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 8 September 1927, ASMAE, AP (I), Arabia, b. 800, fasc. 865; Ministro delle Colonie to Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 21 November 1927, ASMAE, AP (I), Arabia, b, 800, fasc. 865.
88. Gasparini to Federzoni, 8 September 1927, ASMAE, AP (I), Arabia, b, 800, fasc. 865.
89. Ministero delle Colonie to Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 21 November 1927, ASMAE, AP (I), Arabia, b, 800, fasc. 865.
90. Gasparini to Federzoni, 8 September 1927, ASMAE, AP (I), Arabia, b, 800, fasc. 865.
91. A. Chamberlain Minute, 26 July 1927, FO 371/12238, E 3664/22/91, TNA; Osborne Memorandum, 5 August 1927, FO 371/12237, E 3441/22/91, TNA; Symes to Amery, 19 March 1929, FO 371/13721, E1954/54/91, TNA; Eastern Department to Chancery, 1 January 1930, FO 371/13723, E 6569/54/91, TNA.
92. Grandi to de Bono, 23 March 1931, *DDI*, S. 7, Vol. 10, No. 159, 245-8.
93. Grandi to Ministero delle Colonie, 5 September 1927, ASMAE, AP (I), Arabia, b. 800, fasc. 865; Guariglia to Bodornaro, 29 October 1927, ASMAE, AP (I), Arabia, b. 800, fasc. 865; Consolato d'Italia Gedda to Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 30 March 1930, ASMAE, AP (I), b. 805, fasc. 896.
94. Grandi to De Bono, 23 March 1931, *DDI*, S. 7, Vol. 10, No. 159, 245-8.
95. Consolato d'Italia Gedda to Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 30 March 1930, ASMAE, AP (I), b. 805, fasc. 896.
96. Consolato d'Italia Gedda to Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 20 November 1930, ASMAE, AP (II), b. 7, fasc. 4; Guargilia to Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 13 May 1930, ASMAE, AP (II), b. 7, fasc. 4.
97. Canero Medici to Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 7 December 1932, ASMAE, AP (II), b. 7, fasc. 4.
98. See Paternò to Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 5 May 1927, ASMAE, AP (II), b. 7, fasc. 4; Tofo to Ministero Degli; Canero Medici to Ministero degil Affari Esteri, 20 November 1932, ASMAE, AP (II), b. 7, fasc. 4
99. Grandi to De Bono, 16 February 1931, *DDI*, S. 7, Vol. 10, No. 7, 117-21.
100. Grandi to Bordonaro, 22 January 1930, *DDI*, S. 7, Vol. 8, No. 321, 353.
101. Bordonaro to Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 7 April 1928, ASMAE, AP (II), b. 7, fasc. 4.
102. Grandi to de Bono, 23 March 1931, *DDI*, S. 7, Vol. 10, No. 159, 245-8.
103. Mussolini to Bordonaro, 4 June 1928, *DDI,* S. 7, Vol. 6, No. 382, 336.

104. This article adopts the term "intelligence community" from Martin Thomas. See Thomas, 299.
105. See Cassels, *Mussolini's Early Diplomacy*; Neilson, *Britain, Soviet Russia, and the Collapse of the Versailles Order*; Satia, 202-20; Thomas, 90-106; Brückenhaus, 107-168; Wagner, 60–3
106. See Wagner, 60-3; Satia, 202-20.
107. Guariglia to Grandi, 5 March 1930, *DDI*, S. 7, Vol. 8, No. 407, 474-7.
108. See Rapporti Politici, May 1930, ASMAE, AP (I), Arabia, b. 805, fasc. 896; Rapporti Politici, June 1930, ASMAE, AP (I), Arabia, b. 805, fasc. 896; Rapporti Politici, July 1930, ASMAE, AP (I), Arabia, b. 805, fasc. 896
109. Canero Medici to Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 28 May 1930, ASMAE, AP (I), Arabia, b. 805, fasc. 896; Rapporti Politici, July 1930, ASMAE, AP (I), Arabia, b. 806, fasc. 896.
110. Cerruti to Mussolini, 14 April 1928, *DDI*, S. 7, Vol. VI, p 215.
111. Grandi to Bodonaro, 28 November 1928, *DDI*, S. 7, Vol. 7, No. 87, 103-4; Guariglia to De Bono, Bordonaro, Cerruti, 12 June 1929, S. 7, Vol. 7, No. 484, 474-5; Graham to A. Chamberlain, 29 March 1928, FO 371/13004, E 1736/80/91, TNA.
112. See, Azione Sovietica telegraffi, ASMAE, AP (I), Arabia, b. 806, fasc. 897; Sovietica azione, ASMAE, AP (II) Arabia, b. 7, fasc. 2.
113. De Bono to Guariglia, 2 August 1929, *DDI*, S. 7, Vol. 7, No. 573, 562.
114. De Bono to Guariglia, 2 August 1929, *DDI*, S. 7, Vol. 7, No. 573, 562.
115. Memorandum of Soviet Activities in Yemen, January 1928-April 1930, The Resident (Aden) to Colonial Office, CO 725/21/6, TNA.
116. Guariglia to Grandi, 5 March 1930, *DDI*, S. 7, Vol. 8, No. 407, 474-477.
117. Mussolini to De Bono, 17 August 1929, DDI, S. 7, Vol. 7, No. 595, 590-1; Guariglia to Grandi, 5 March 1930, *DDI*, S. 7, Vol. 8, No. 407, 474-477.
118. R. Vaughn to FO, 5 September 1927. FO 371/12238, E 3878/22/91, TNA.
119. R. Vaughn to FO, 5 September 1927. FO 371/12238, E 3878/22/91, TNA.
120. Eastern Department Memorandum, 26 April 1929, FO 371/13721, E 2208/54/91, TNA.
121. Memorandum of Soviet Activities in Yemen, January 1928-April 1930, The Resident (Aden) to Colonial Office, CO 725/21/6, TNA.
122. Lloyd to A. Chamberlain, 14 January 1928, FO 371/13003, E 384/80/91, TNA.
123. Lloyd to A. Chamberlain, 14 January 1928, FO 371/13003, E 384/80/91, TNA.
124. Sheikh Hafez Wahaba to Lloyd, 9 January 1928, FO 371/13003, E 384/80/91, TNA.
125. Lloyd to A. Chamberlain, 14 January 1928, FO 371/13003, E 384/80/91, TNA.
126. Eastern Department Memorandum, 26 April 1929, FO 371/13721, E 2208/54/91, TNA.
127. See Osborne Minute, 27 January 1928, FO 371/13003, E 384/80/91, TNA; Oliphant Minute, 6 February 1928, FO 371/13003, E 384/80/91, TNA.
128. Appunti su una Riunione tenutasi a Palazzo Chigi, 27 June 1930, *DDI*, S. 7, Vol. 9, No. 117, 152; Grandi to De Bono, 23 June 1931, *DDI*, S. 7, Vol. 10, No. 250, 376-8.
129. Osborne Minute,19 January 1927, FO 371/12235, E 345/22/91, TNA; Graham to FO, 29 March 1928, 371/13004, E 1736/80/91, TNA. Satia argues that this scepticism was a result of a tension between the Foreign Office and the Indian Office. See Satia, 207.
130. Grandi to Bordonaro, 28 November 1928, *DDI*, S. 7, Vol. 7, No. 87, 103.
131. Symes to Amery, 29 March 1929, FO 371/13721, E 1954/54/91, TNA.
132. Symes to Amery, 31 December, 1928, FO 371/13721, E 54/54/91, TNA.
133. Appunti su una Riunione tenutasi a Palazzo Chigi, 27 June 1930, *DDI*, S. 7, Vol. 9, No. 117, 152
134. Grandi to De Bono, 23 March 1931, *DDI*, S. 7, Vol. 10, No. 159, 245-8.
135. Thomas, 6; Pedersen, 4-5.

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